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ABSTRACT

While electronic mail (e-mail) has accomplished an "instructional objective" of the fastest growing method of communication, the backlash can be harmful with respect to workforce productivity. The capabilities of online communications have broadened methods in which instructors and students can interact, business operate, and people converse. This paper uses the findings from management structured online classes of geographically dispersed students engaged in virtual teams. The study in the paper used a case study method to examine experiences and practices of "netiquette" by these students--data were collected from an online survey (n=97) designed to assess four components as they relate to each other and the overall instructional objective. The paper describes online students' experiences and practices of netiquette. Includes survey data. Contains 5 references. (Author/NKA)

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Beyond Spam! Netiquette in Virtual Teams

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Abstract

The capabilities of on-line communications have broadened methods in which instructors and students can interact, business operate and people converse. This paper will use the findings from management structured on-line classes of geographically dispersed students engaged in virtual teams. The discussion will describe on-line students experiences and practices of netiquette.

I. INTRODUCTION

Electronic Mail (E-mail) was designed to electronically transmit a message instantaneously. It has justifiably obtained this objective with respect to being the fastest growing method of communication. However, one barrier, "spam-junk electronic mail", is continuously examined as to how it may be regulated. Emerging from discussions are effective methods for virtual team communications. Hence, it is essential Business Instructors implement strategies and practices regarding instructional delivery that enables students' to use course applications for professional usage. Moreover, prepare these future business professionals with an understanding of the global business environment in which they will communicate and function.

II. INSTRUCTIONAL and PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The changing workplace as it relates to technological changes has emphasized a need to address the manner in which employees are supervised. A study conducted by the Privacy Foundation released findings that 14 million employees are subject to monitoring of email and Internet use. [1] Even more suggestive are findings by the American Management Association, that nearly two thirds of all companies discipline employees for abuse of email or Internet connections and 27% dismiss employees using this reason. [2]

These findings are relevant in that they provide a framework for instructional strategies. Similar to the workplace colleges and universities most focus instructional methods in preparing current and future workers with technological changes. Thus, investigation of virtual team communications as it relates to the use of netiquette-an unwritten code of behavior for electronic communication is timely in its examination as a regulator for spam.

III. METHODS

The case study method was used to examine experiences and practices of netiquette by geographically dispersed students in management structured on-line classes in which virtual teams was an instructional objective. Data was collected from an on-line survey designed to assess four components as they relate to each other and the overall instructional objective.

Component one focused the concept of virtual teams (students). The questions were designed to assess advantages and disadvantages of using virtual teams as an instructional objective.

Component two will focused the content (on-line communication). The questions were designed to assess theoretical and practical applications of virtual teams. One measure was used to determine virtual teams usage across disciplinary lines.

Component three focused netiquette (on-line behavior). The questions were designed to assess the on-line students pre (current course) and post (after course) experiences and practices of netiquette.

Component four focused professional applications of virtual on-line teams. The questions were designed to assess the linkage of instructional strategies to professional (workplace) applications.

III. FINDINGS

Some instructional and practical implication can be concluded from this study. However, one area that is worthy of mentioning before discussing is sample size. The case study method using two upper level on-line management courses of one instructor provided collection of 97 on-line surveys. Consequently, a standard frequency distribution analysis using the program Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was performed.

Component one virtual teams (students): advantages and disadvantages of using virtual teams as an instructional objective.

Data supports advantages of virtual teams as an instructional tool.

- Experience with virtual teams (samples size depicted experiences and practice of individuals with one semester or less) Data provides feedback with respect to virtual teams as an Instructional tool
- Establish work team trust (majority viewed themselves a members of a team)
- On-line assignments followed a logical format providing feedback on a regular basis (introverted learners)

Experience with Virtual Team

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 sem or less	57	58.8	58.8	58.8
	2 sem	25	25.8	25.8	84.5
	3 sem	12	12.4	12.4	96.9
	3+ sem	3	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	100.0	

Position in Virtual Team

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Team Leader	7	7.2	7.2	7.2
	Member	89	91.8	91.8	99.0
	Other	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	100.0	

Did obj for virtual team assignmnt follow logical format?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	88	90.7	90.7	90.7
	No	9	9.3	9.3	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	100.0	

Did virtual Instr provide feedback on reg basis?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	82	84.5	84.5	84.5
	No	14	14.4	14.4	99.0
	Undecided	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	100.0	

Component two content (on-line communication): theoretical and practical applications of virtual teams.

Data supports connection of instructional material and practical applications

- The majority of response were from Business students (overall perception was that virtual team experiences and practices can help in their discipline)
- Three instructional objectives were assessed given management focus of multi-tasks abilities (Likert Scale 5 Strongly Agree – 1 Strongly Disagree)

Communication Techniques	24% Strongly Agree	52% Agree
Time Management	28% Strongly Agree	37% Agree
Work Teams	23% Strongly Agree	43% Agree

❖ Future study will determine virtual teams usage across disciplinary lines.

C21

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Business	82	84.5	85.4	85.4
	Humanities & Soc Sci	8	8.2	8.3	93.8
	Sci & Tech	6	6.2	6.3	100.0
	Total	96	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		97	100.0		

Component three (on-line behavior): pre (current course) and post (after course) experiences and practices of netiquette.

Data supports the need to continue investigating instructional strategies that include discussion of netiquette.

- Pre (current course) experiences with Netiquette [52% No 44% % Yes]
- During the course discussion of Netiquette [54% No 42% Yes]
- Post (after course) experiences with Netiquette [61% Yes 35% No]
- Three practical applications of on-line communications were assessed focusing Netiquette:
 - Courses [77% Yes 17% No]
 - Work [81% Yes 12% No]
 - Personal [72% Yes 1% No]

Component four assess professional applications of virtual on-line teams.

Data supports linkage of instructional strategies to practical applications.

- Applications that are transitional to employment [85% Yes 10% No]
- Instructional Objectives focusing traditional versus virtual work place scenarios [76% Yes 22% No]
- Workplace Virtual Teams (practices) [74% Yes 24% No]
- Enhancement of Virtual Skills (experiences) [81% Yes 17% No]

IV. IMPLICATIONS

The data collected provides assessment as to the extent instructional strategies are able to use students' experiences and practices to apply netiquette on-line. Although the study has limitations with respect to sample size, factors examined afford opportunities for expanded research of this topic.

Data supporting the aforementioned implications are depicted in tables below from the background section of the survey.

Have you taken a course on line previously?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	60	61.9	61.9	61.9
No	37	38.1	38.1	100.0
Total	97	100.0	100.0	

If so, would you take an on-line course?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	57	58.8	58.8	58.8
	No	5	5.2	5.2	63.9
	3.00	35	36.1	36.1	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	100.0	

Another result worthy of mentioning is that of work team concepts. One primary objective is to create a virtual environment of trust. Moreover, avoid challenges of communication barriers created as a result of team members' location, time and culture.

Data from this study shows respondents perceptions at a high level of understanding as it relates to work team culture diversity.

Was your team culturally diverse?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	85	87.6	87.6	87.6
	No	12	12.4	12.4	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	100.0	

The findings of this case study provide data to support instructional strategies with a by-product of professional application (netiquette) with respect to on-line communications. Hence, with the U. S. on-line workforce being an estimated total of 140 million this topic is timely in it's discussion. [3] Accordingly, it provides the current and next workforce population with a valuable solution to perceived interruptions in workplace productivity. A study conducted by Pitney Bowes shows the majority of workers are interrupted by communication technology every ten minutes. The average U.S. worker receives over 200 emails per day, 1,000 messages a week..[4]

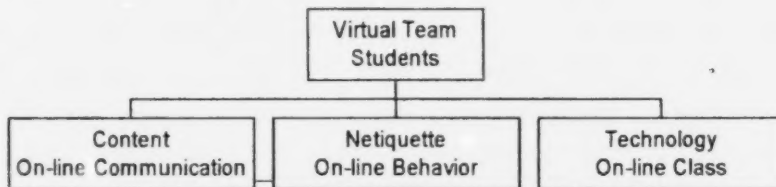
Mirroring academic and business concerns about netiquette as it relates to spam (unsolicited bulk commercial e-mail messages), the 106th Congress examined an Unsolicited Electronic Mail Act. Although it did not pass, discussion resumes in the 107th Congress; additionally, many states have enacted laws making it illegal to send unsolicited e-mail messages. [5]

V. CONCLUSION

Ironically, while Electronic Mail (E-mail) has accomplished an "instructional objective" of the fastest growing method of communication; the backlash can be harmful with respect to workforce productivity. Thus, this study examining instructional strategies that enhance the use of netiquette as it relates to on line communication depict findings with implications that support practical applications.

VI. FOOTNOTES/REFERENCES

- [1] The Privacy Foundation, The Extent of Systemic Monitoring of Employee E-mail and Internet use, July 9, 2001 available at sonic.net/~undoc/extent.htm.
- [2] American Management Association, 2001 Annual Survey on Workplace Monitoring and Surveillance, April 18, 2001.
- [3] The Privacy Foundation, The Extent of Systemic Monitoring of Employee E-mail and Internet use, July 9, 2001 available at privacyfoundation.org/workplace/technology/extent.asp
- [4] Available at: archive.document.londonlinks.ac.uk/rliu/northcirc/issue19/other.htm
- [5] Available at: spamlaws.com/federal/summ107.html and spamlaws.com/state/summary.html





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